

Jazz band kicks off free concert series

Bring your blanket and appreciation for good music to four free concerts under the stars at Steele Indian School Park's amphitheater, Third Street and Indian School Road, Phoenix. The first begins at 8 p.m. Saturday with a performance by Pete Pancrazi's Jazz Trio. The concerts, sponsored by the Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department, are held the first Saturday of the month through September. Details: (602) 495-0739.

10,000 simple steps to fitness

Taking 10,000 steps a day will deliver health benefits, says the Cooper Institute, a health research and education center near Dallas. Just clip on a step counter or pedometer (available at discount and sporting goods stores or online for \$10 and up) and start moving. But it's not as easy as it sounds: Depending on your stride, 10,000 steps equals four to five miles.

Lessons in love

Abandoned dogs teach troubled kids to care

By Scott Craven



Photos by Carl Takemoto Williams/The Arizona Republic

Above: Ruby eyes a treat; Jon Moran, 14, eyes Ruby.

Right: John Kline, 13, receives some unconditional love from Kandi. The boys participated in Teaching Love and Compassion, a program in which kids learn to care for dogs while also learning about themselves.

Learning to care

Jon knew from the day he was handed Ruby's leash that he would play a small part in her life. At the end of the monthlong Teaching Love and Compassion program at Mesa's Taylor Junior High, Jon and his partner, Jeremy Page, would hand Ruby to her new owner, or, if a home could not be found, she'd go back to the shelter.

But the inevitable parting was too far away to be a concern. There was much excitement as the 12 stu-

View a slide show of the dogs at azcentral.com.

INSIDE: A TV show inspired the program in Mesa. E3.

dents chosen to participate met the six homeless dogs they would train. With luck, each animal would have a family to go to when the program concluded at the end of April.

The program, conducted jointly by Mesa Public Schools and Maricopa County Animal Care and Control, also would benefit the students, each of whom faced emotional, psychological and social challenges. Students would find out how to care for another living thing while learning a little bit about themselves.

And this April morning, as the program culminated with a graduation ceremony, students let go of the

leash for the last time. Many were too lost in the moment to remember the encouraging words of their teacher Pat Policastro: "Sometimes doing something good hurts, and the more good it does, the more it can hurt."

It was the second time the program was offered to students in Policastro's class for emotionally disabled students.

Her class was chosen because Policastro, in addition to having 18 years of experience with special-needs kids, often brought one of her pet Dobermans to class

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dig for gold in hush-hush gathering

By Jaimee Rose
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Ozzy Osbourne's ring was in town this week, but you not supposed to know.

Those million-dollar Stuart Weitzman diamond sandals everyone cooed over at the Oscars dropped in for a hush-hush visit, too.

Deep in the recesses of Valley hotel ballroom this week — at a location so secret that we've been gagged



Carl Takemoto Williams/The Arizona Republic
Platinum and diamond was by Harry Winston.

from revealing the name was a secret meeting of the world's most chichi jewelers, armed with millions of dollars in the best diamonds and gemstones. Officially, they were here to unveil their new collection to select retailers, but unofficially, this was see-and-be-seen at its finest: air-kiss name-dropping, "who are you wearing?" galore.

The Classic Couture Jewelry Collection & Conference was invitation only, which means: Don't tell. (Yes, I spell jewelry with two P's.)

Harry Winston was here and Fabergé, too. Miss Europe Isabel Darras strutted in a little black dress and diamonds. Fashion editors from *Vogue* and *Allure* combed the scene. (Free sashes courtesy of *Allure*.) In the break room. Looking for diamonds is such hard work. Women wore \$40,000 necklaces with tank tops and jeans.

Everyone buzzed about the new things: Coral is the new turquoise. And jewelry that does double duty, like \$2.5 million 150-karat diamond tiara that is also a necklace.

"There's only a few things you can show up wearing same tiara," said a secret representative from Louis G. & Company, which made piece. She was kidding, but not really.

There was lots of talk about stars, but designer the stars Henry Dunay is telling who has his coral bracelet. Until you see a wearing it in a magazine says, "you shut your mouth." Discretion is everything.

New homes for program's lucky canines

Six dogs were paired with Mesa junior high students for a month before joining new families:

BORIS (formerly Bubba), is a 5- or 6-year-old male Rottweiler-spaniel mix. He'd been neutered and partially trained, indicating he once had an owner. Boris was adopted by his foster family.

RUBY (formerly Queenie), is a female sheltie mix estimated to be 6 years old. She'd been transferred from another shelter and had suffered a slight wound on her muzzle, perhaps from a dogfight. She was adopted by her foster family.

KANDI is a 1- or 2-year-old male Welsh corgi mix. He was picked up as a stray and some training was evident. Kandi was adopted by an elderly Mesa couple.

CHANCE is a 2-year-old male Rottweiler-mastiff mix. He'd been turned in by owners twice because of his size and energetic personality. He was adopted by young couple who live on a small ranch in Wyoming.

BOND (formerly Radar), is a 2- or 3-year-old male sheep dog-terrier mix. Owners brought him to the shelter when they could no longer care for him. Bond was adopted by his foster family.

TONY (formerly Tyler), a 2-year-old male Brittany spaniel mix, was turned in by his owners because he was high-strung. He was adopted by his foster family.



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 because he can also understand what you're saying.
”

Wes Jefferies
 Student dog handler

Kids say goodbye, but get to keep new compassion

LESSONS from E1

to help relate to the students. The dog was allowed to roam freely, connecting with the youths on a level no person can.

"I always want the kids to be greeted by someone who is happy they're there," Policastro said. "And there are some days I just can't do that. But my Dobie is right there, welcoming them and licking their hands."

The right dog

Gary DiGeronimo knew what to look for while searching for six dogs suitable for the TLC program at Taylor.

DiGeronimo, an animal behaviorist contracted to help run the program with Julie Bank, director of public programs for Animal Care and Control, roamed the aisles of the county's Pet Adoption center looking for candidates. Each dog had to be healthy and work well with others. Simply put, the kind of animal prompting him to say, "I can't believe someone gave up on this dog."

Within a few hours he had his selections, ranging from the calm and easygoing Ruby to rough-and-tumble Chance, a Rottweiler-mastiff mix who was quite happy to lean his 80-pound frame against the nearest set of legs and who was, DiGeronimo summed up, "one big galoot of a dog."

For the next 20 school days, these dogs would work an hour a day with a dozen kids molded over the years by life's imperfections, perhaps difficult home lives, or verbal and emotional abuse, or even chemical imbalances in the brain.

After each training session, the dogs would be put back in their crates (to be picked up by their foster parents at the end of the school day) and the students would talk about how to treat animals as well as people.

"You should be nice to dogs, but you should be nice to people too," said Wes Jefferies, 13, after a lesson on how a harsh tone of voice affects animals and people the same way. "A dog is scared if you're yelling, but a person can be hurt more because he can also understand what you're saying."

No one in the program assumed that four weeks of dog training could turn around these kids' lives. But it was believed it could turn them in a new direction, leading to a ripple effect that might touch their lives for years.

Good things were clearly evident the first time the program was offered at Taylor in late 2001, when 12 kids shared an experience they would not soon forget.

"I've been working with these kinds of kids for 18 years, and I've never seen a program impact them as much as this class with dogs," Policastro said. "The kids un-

derstand it.

the animals to calm them before training began. The quiet time had the same effect on the students. Walking into Policastro's room during first hour, a visitor would have found it hard to believe some of these kids are prone to threats or violence, that others suffer uncontrollable outbursts that make them unsuitable classmates.

Jon lay quietly next to Ruby, stroking the sheltie around her neck and chest.

"Good dog, good Ruby," he cooed as the dog wagged her tail slowly in appreciation. Ruby's deep brown eyes stare into Jon's, neither dog nor boy knowing how much they had in common.

Ruby was turned in to the Maricopa County animal shelter for reasons that were never recorded by the employees. Somehow, someone could no longer live with this gentle dog.

Jon certainly did not understand it.



Talene Williams/The Arizona Republic

"I don't like that somebody just kicked her out on the streets," he said. "She's so calm and nice. I'd keep her forever."

Jon, too, was trying to find his place in the world. As a child in Nebraska, his parents gave him to his grandmother to raise because they didn't have the means to support him. He still lives with his grandmother, rarely seeing his mom and dad, who remain in Omaha.

Jon is prone to emotional and, at times, violent outbursts. One reason, said special education teacher Teri Schulte, whom Jon sees for half the day, is his "issues with abandonment."

But just two weeks into the TLC program, Schulte said she saw wonderful improvements in Jon's behavior. Schulte said Jon was more focused on his work and not so easily frustrated. She added that Jon, who loved to talk about his cat, Sam, had suddenly become a dog person.

"He has to work through his demons and emotions," Schulte said. "He's struggled when he's had to work with other kids, but I can tell he's having fun."

One example was clear at



Cici Salcedo Williams/The Arizona Republic

Top: Kandi, a Welsh-corgi mix, watches student handler John Kline for a command as the dogs are presented to their adoptive families.

Above: Jon Moran, 14, gives Ruby, a sheltie mix, a scratch behind the ears. After caring for the dogs for a month, students must say goodbye.

Right: Andy Thatcher, 12, greets Bond, a sheep dog-terrier mix.

His behavior has improved at home as well. The first words out of Jon's mouth when he arrived home each day usually had something to do with Ruby, said Josephine Moran, his grandmother.

"You would have thought he spent the whole day with the dog instead of just an hour," Moran said. "He just loved seeing her."

Lessons learned

TLC's impact cannot be measured with grades or test scores. The tools typically used to gauge success in school do not apply to a program that is the first of its kind in Maricopa County.

That was why, nearing the end of the four weeks, teachers look for the small



Tom Tingle/The Arizona Republic

among the most talkative.

There was Andy, 14, who would not raise his head to answer questions and yet spoke to an audience of nearly 50 people to tell them about his dog.

There was Tyler, 13, who had spoken of abusing animals and by the program's end had befriended the family dog that had once run from him.

There was Ryan, 14, a tough kid who refused to let on to his feelings until he said a tearful goodbye to Kandi, a friendly Welsh corgi who gladly licked away the tears.

And there was Jon, who took from the program not only love for a dog, but an awareness of compassion, and that you can let go of

for lunch. Most of the new owners had left with their dogs; the kids were left to their feelings.

In their hearts, they knew they had done the right thing.

Two students walked their dog (to them, it would always be "their dog") to the parking lot, then waved goodbye as the dog hopped into the adoptive couple's car, a leap as practiced as if she'd been doing it all her life.

A few others returned to Policastro's classroom where class assignments would soon await them. And a few sat quietly, sifting through feelings that four weeks ago they'd not believed could exist.

Jon, having finished his piece of the celebratory cake and having said goodbye to

Pet therapy program inspired by TV show

By Scott Craven
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People who say there is nothing good on TV will have an argument from Elaine Miner.

A TV show featuring therapy dogs prompted Miner to look into the possibilities of having dogs work with at-risk kids in the Mesa School District. The result was Teach Love and Compassion, a program pairing homeless dogs with emotionally troubled students to benefit both.

Miner, the school board's president, was inspired by HBO special featuring the

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Julie Bank
 Maricopa County
 Animal Care and Control

Delta Society, which promotes and sponsors the use of animals for therapy and service.

Miner was so impressed with the positive effect dogs had on everyone from troubled kids to hospital patients that she instructed staff members to look into bringing such a program to the Mesa school district.

Julie Bank of Maricopa County Animal Care and Control, who was contacted by the district, suggested several possibilities varying in cost and time commitment. District officials approved the TLC program, the one that demanded the most money and effort.

"I was surprised," Bank said. "Usually a school district will look for the easy way out and choose the least expensive program. Not this time. It was obvious they wanted it done right."

Miner initially wanted the program to target students at risk of dropping out, thinking the dogs would serve as motivation to attend class. She changed her mind shortly after hearing about Taylor Junior High teacher Pat Policastro, who was already using dogs successfully to reach her emotionally challenged students.

"Pat seemed the perfect match," she said. "You need a lot of patience and determination to work with dogs or special-needs kids. I'm not sure the program could get off a good start without her."

Miner would like to see TLC continue for at least another year in Policastro's classroom, doing at least two other sessions of the monthlong program before its future is assessed. If TLC remains as successful as it